6: McFee E-4,5 (1959-1967) 1972 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

for playing the stick game as well as pool and cards was a regular gathering place for the people of Heart Butte until it burned down a few years ago. The weekly stick games have moved to a new location on Badger Creek.

The horse races attract some white-oriented horse fans, but the majority of the crowd is Indian-oriented. Races are occasions for Indian rivalry and above all to enjoy each other's company. The stick games have a regular but more limited following and with few exceptions, players and observers are Indian-oriented.

Song services are meetings of the singing groups and serve both as practice sessions and as forms of social gathering for the people involved. The sessions are usually held in the home of one of the singers, a relative, or a friend. A few kinsmen and friends—young and old, men and women—attend and the evening is spent in singing and drumming old and new songs. The sessions break up at the discretion of the singers and may be followed by a late supper.

Bundle openings and curing ceremonies (according to informant and newspaper reports) are religious rituals to which guests are invited. The reports indicate that those in attendance are always people of Indian-orientation. Some are believers and others are sympathetic but noncommitted members of the participants' families. The activities on these occasions are determined by the ritual of the particular bundle or cure, but involve singing, drumming, prayers and some dancing by selected participants. The owner of the bundle regularly paints the faces of those in attendance as a mark of prayer for their well being. Bundle opening ceremonies are followed by a feast. One such ceremony held at Starr School was described by one of the neighbors:

> The beaver dance given by Jim White Calf was held at the home of Jim and Amy Whitegrass despite the terrific storm and sudden cold. There were many people from Browning out to see this rare dance, that has long been forgotten. Among those attending were Mr. and Mrs. Fish Wolf Robe, Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Horn, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Many Guns and Mary Ground besides the many people of our community. The dance began with the rythmic [sic] beating on hides to certain songs. The bundle was opened by Jim White Calf and Maggie Many Hides. The bundle consists of many skins of useful animals and small birds that are of help to the owner. The beaver for "energy," the otter for "speed," the ermine for "beauty," the swan for "grace" and the little birds for their endurance of the cold in the winter. The people were then painted and eight danced in a most graceful manner. Maggie Many Hides, Mary Ground, Isabelle, Cecile Horn, Mrs. Fish, Annie Old Person, Mrs. Tom Many Guns all danced like beavers with sticks in their mouths and hands. The usual meal was served after a monstrous amount of energy was put into the dancing and singing. A delicious berry soup, boiled meat, fried bread and a dessert were consumed by everyone. At the end of the dance one certain lady gets up and dances with little small deer hooves and punches a man in the crowd and it goes on until everyone is dancing. It was a most enjoyable occasion for a grand time was had by all (*Glacier Reporter*, October 12, 1961:6).

This "dance" was "long forgotten" by the reporter and others in the community but not by the bundle-owner and the named participants, several of whom owned or had owned bundles themselves. Here was a gathering of Indian-oriented people conducting an Indian ceremony. Some undoubtedly experienced the deep religious experience of a beaver bundle opening, others had a "grand time" at a "most

6: McFee E-4,5 (1959-1967) 1972 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

enjoyable occasion," a social gathering of people who shared interests in aspects of Indian culture.

The social grouping of Indian-oriented people gains further support from observations of informal clustering. At the Indian Days encampment, and at the social dances in particular, it was relatively easy to watch for the Indian-oriented people and to notice with whom they spent their time in informal groupings—visiting, chatting, watching, and relaxing. Most of such visiting was with people of similar orientation with only occasional mixing among men of differing orienta-

The forming of the tepee circle for North American Indian Days.

tions. Other observations and reports further support these conclusions. Visits to homes, reported visiting among families and friends, and observations of grouping on other occasions reinforced the pattern.

In 1962 I wrote:

> Perhaps the most visible visiting pattern for the Indian-oriented people is the very regular daily congregation in sidewalk groups. From late spring to mid-autumn as many as eighty people can be seen standing or sitting at fairly predictable locations around the town. The location is determined by people's inclinations and by the requirements of sun, shade, or shelter from the wind. People pass many hours a day, visiting and watching the passers-by. White-oriented men are on the street but stop for only short periods of time and then move on, but the Indian-oriented man and his friends make this a major avocation.
>
> If the weather is bad the visitors form smaller groups and move into the nearby

Part 1

CEREMONIAL AND RELIGIOUS USES OF PLANTS

Overview

824 237 The role of plants in the religious and ceremonial life of the Blackfoot was* no less important than that of animals: both were essential for a correct re-enactment of the sacred event. The function of animal artifacts appears to have been documentation in general; the function of certain plant species was preparatory in nature.

781 778 824 By "preparatory" is meant the ritualistic use of plants to help place a person (or a group, such as a tribal society) in a condition to receive power from the sacred realm. The objects contained in the bundles and the charms of personal use attested to the original sacred event by which such power was conferred, and they were the symbolic means through which the [302] [554] revelation was demonstrated. The real power of the ceremony, commonly but mistakenly thought to reside in the songs, really lay in the face-painting, and the owner of the design reserved the right of initial benefit and source. He was the human proprietor of the sacred gift.

783 824 The preparatory role of the plants was essentially that of purification. Blackfoot mythology and ceremonial procedure show that the prerequisite of favors from the supernatural realm was the symbolic shedding of daily life. This cleansing---so suggestive of the initial stages of a rite of passage---usually was brought about in either or both of two ways: the subject could [782] pass through an ordeal in a small enclosure, the sweat lodge. It is important to note that incensing was prescribed primarily for the handling

[128] *We use the past tense with few exceptions, throughout, because Blackfoot ceremonials belong, alas, mainly to earlier times. However, certain practices persist, albeit in more or less abbreviated or distorted form; and to that extent a "present tense" reading of this account is warranted.

824 778 773 The mediating nature of plants can be seen in the important function of the Holy Turnip of the Natoas bundle. The turnip (symbolized by a plumed headdress) was the plant that was pulled from the ground by the woman who married Morning Star and went to live in the sky. It was through the hole left by the plant that she saw her people once again; then she became homesick and at length returned, bringing with her the Natoa bundle as a gift from the supernatural realm. The turnip had quite literally become a gate through which the connection between man and the supernatural was realized.

824 [783] It was no accident that all the plants used in the smudges and sweat lodges were aromatic herbs. Sweet grass, juniper, alpine fir, and sage yielded potent scents to those in need.

[821] Another practice illustrates this point. It is well known that the elements of the weather were personified by the Blackfoot. Such was the [782] case with the thunder. It was during heavy storms that needles of alpine fir (Abies lasiocarpa) were placed on a smudge with the expressed desire that Thunder would smell the symbolic offering, recognize his loyal subjects, and keep his lightning away from the camps.

[781] The figuring of plants in important parts of Blackfoot religion and mythology is evidence of strong belief in their effectiveness in helping anyone disposed to use them for attaining spirituality. Other plants had slightly different functions in the religious life of the Blackfoot---aspen and poplar (Populus spp.) for centerpoles, the "power root" (Angelica dawsonii) of the Horn Society, and tobacco---but the difference seems to have been one of degree rather than essence.

This overview is not meant to be more than suggestive of Blackfoot religious conceptions. The topic far exceeds the scope of this study. Our task is merely to document some of the uses of plants in Blackfoot religious activity. The remainder of this paper is devoted to those particulars.

20: Hungry Wolf I-4,5 (no date) 1980
NF6 Blackfoot NF6
Blood

as the adviser to these newer members. I am their grandmother. This is how Mokakin and I have been rewarded for our faith in the holy ways of our people. I have taken part in all these ancient ceremonies so often that I would be able to lead them all, if our customs didn't require men to be the ceremonial leaders.

PAULA WEASEL HEAD'S COMMENTS ON LIFE

We old people of the Bloods are very disturbed about the behavior of the young people. There is very little respect left today. A lot of us think the reason for this is that a lot of young people were bottle-fed. The milk they were raised on came from cows, so the young people of today have taken on the nature of cows. You know that cows only think of themselves, even though they like to run in bunches. Many of the young people are just the same.

Yes, I think there is still hope for them to change, in the future. . . . If they will listen to good leaders, and learn to have respect for all things, not just those that are theirs, and if they will pray. Praying is what has brought us old people through life. We've all gone through hard times. We've all done our share of bad things. But through our prayers and faith in the Creator we get together again and we try hard to live right.

A few years ago Mokakin and I celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary. Even the government leaders sent us cards. We have had a long life together—good times and bad times. We have grown wise from the experiences we've gone through.

Our sacred transfers are the things that kept us the strongest in life. We believed in our religion, just like our old people handed it down to us. For every important thing they did in life there was a transfer—an initiation. Somebody that has

[Beaver Bundle Ceremony]

at the same time yelling in low voices. [More songs.] The two wives of the priests took a bundle of sticks from the sacred bundle and swung them to and from the altar, keeping time. [The cawing and pecking were actually imitations of ravens, not crows. The rattles were usually made either from buffalo rawhide or from scrotums of buffalo. While pecking on the rattles of buffalo skin, the ravens sang, "The wind is our Medicine—Powerful dead buffalo we want," referring to the buffalo carcasses ravens feasted upon after hunters finished butchering them. When the singers first took up the rattles and beat them on the rawhide, they sang, "My rattles are Powerful." The sticks the women took were probably extra incense tongs, which were kept with every Beaver Bundle.] 796 778 533 [825] [534] [237]

In fourth song the two squaws got up and danced around the room, one holding a root digger, a stick sharpened at one end and one edge; this was painted red as were all the implements. Whistles were produced and tooted during the following songs. After three more were sung, Running Wolf took a pipe-stem and got down upon his knees and bobbed about in which performance he was soon joined by his wife and Three Bulls' wife. With their blankets drawn up around their heads, they kept up those singular antics, working their hands in imitation of the beaver. That ended by all three people, 3 times lowering their heads to the sacred bundle and grunting several times, and then they took hold of the outside covers and shook them as if to frighten away a spirit. During all this time, "Moons" wife, who is a great wag, was cracking jokes and making fun of almost every movement of Running Wolf. [This part of the ceremony, taken with light spirit, often evokes laughter when the Old People leading the ceremony try to imitate small animals at work. The amount of fun-making at our holy ceremonies would probably amaze a visitor. But our ceremonies are meant to bring happiness and harmony, not gloominess and 796 778 533 [535] [412] [531] [534] [533] [825] [522] 796 778 781

[p.93-B]

[Beaver Bundle Ceremony]

fear. When someone is praying, however, there is always silence and respect.] 796 778

Running Wolf and the two women, singing as they did so, now proceeded to unroll the pipe from its coverings, which were four in number, the outside one being of red stroud and the others ordinary calico. Outside of each cover was wound a long strand of buckskin, painted red. Singing ceased long before the unwrapping was finished. At 1:10, rattles and songs were renewed, but a man from the number sitting in the house brought a common pipe ready for lighting and kneeled in a most solemn manner in front of R Wolf and presented it to him. The latter dropped his rattles and took the pipe. When the singing ceased, he held the pipe with stem to the altar and made a long prayer, at the conclusion of which all responded and the pipe was handed back to the still kneeling man who returned with it to the other men, who at once lit it and passed it around to all the men. 781 796 778 276 [782]

This pipe had a stem too long for one man to light and smoke at the same time. One man applied the match, while another used the mouthpiece. [This is the proper way of lighting a pipe, even if it has a short stem. One man has the duty of "cutting the tobacco." He sits before the cutting board, mixes the smoking herbs, fills the pipe, and lights it for the first smoker.] A three-pound [a carrot, or bundle of rolled and twisted tobacco leaves] of tobacco was now divided into many pieces by the two squaws above mentioned and a portion given to each person present. The women near the door now busied themselves with serving out stewed tongues into many little pans and bowls; each singer held up a rattle while Running Wolf sang, and Moon prayed loudly 7 times. Each man and woman present was handed a single dried sarvisberry which was held waiting for the proper time to eat it. R Wolf in next song held his berry to the altar and then put it in his mouth, all doing likewise. At once he and the other musicians took up one rattle each and poked it with fingers of other hand at same time 796 778 264 [533] [782] [262] [533] [825]

24: Schultz F-3 (1877-1947) 1980 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

114 General Custer and General Miles, who was with Major Reno on the day of the Custer fight; J. B. (Jack) Monroe, experienced mountain man, hunter, and trapper (not related to Hugh Monroe).

Jack Monroe readily agreed to join our exploring expedition, and when Grinnell arrived early in September we met him at the agency with team and wagon, loaded with a complete camping outfit and the requisite number of saddle horses and pack horses for our purpose. But we were not to make an immediate start for the mountains; the Pikuni chief insisted that their good friend Fisher Hat (Grinnell) visit and council with them. Old Red Eagle, owner of the sacred elk-tongue medicine pipe and bundle, unwrapped it in honor of him, an hours-long ceremony of fervent singing of sacred songs, sacred dancing, and fervent prayers, in which Sun, Moon, and Morning Star were implored to give long and full life to Fisher Hat, true, [781] helpful friend of the Pikunis. The sincerity of the old man and his men and women helpers, their absolute faith in their sky gods, was very affecting, even to us, unbelievers in any faith.

133 In good time we made camp, as in the previous autumn, close below the foot of Upper St. Mary Lake and on the west side of the river. Two days later, after caching most of our belongings—tent, groceries, and the like—we set out with saddle horses and a couple of pack horses to go up Swift Current River. From its junc- [487] tion with St. Mary River, we followed a good Indian and game trail up its north side, passed several small lakes in its course, and that evening camped on the shore of a beautiful lake at the junction of several of its forks—the Jealous Woman's Lake of the Blackfoot tribes, but now, to our great disgust, named Lake Josephine!

During the summer I had often talked with Hugh Monroe, Rising Wolf, about the St. Mary lakes–Swift Current River country, and he had told me that, years back, with his family he had often camped at the foot of Lower St. Mary Lake; once had wintered there; but had never gone up Swift Current farther than its third lake nor up St. Mary Valley farther than the foot of its upper lake, for always game of all kinds—buffalo, moose, elk, and deer—had been plentiful close to his camp. So when, in the morning, we saddled and

24: Schultz F-3 (1877-1947) 1980 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

cause me trouble. One or the other or both of them stole my sacred bow-case and hid it," he growled, and with that left us. 721 778

At a secret council of chiefs and medicine men in head chief Lone Walker's lodge, Lame Bull told of his son's suspicion of the two, with the result that the whole tribe of us was ordered out to look for the bow-case. All up and down the long bottom, all through the cottonwood groves and along the berry-bushed slopes of the valley, two thousand men, women, and children searched for it, and without result. Then Mad Wolf was summoned before a second council of the wise ones and asked to agree that whoever could find the sacred bow-case should have the honor of giving it to Sun at the appointed time.

"What, let Fox Head or Short Bow produce my sacred bow-case and later on give it to Sun! Oh, no! No! No! he cried.

Long they pleaded with him—Lame Bull even tearfully. They said that the welfare, the future of the tribe for all time to come depended upon the recovery of the bow-case, long since promised to Sun. At last he gave in. But nothing came of a second thorough search for it, which, we later learned, had not been joined by Short Bow and Fox Head. Said Mad Wolf when our old-man informer had gone: "So that's how it is. They dare not bring my sacred bow-case from where they hid it for fear that I would kill them."

From Judith River on to Fort Lewis the Pikunis were a dejected, silent people. I wondered if they would ever get over the loss of the sacred bow-case. Day and night they were in constant fear of their [781] sky god's displeasure. We arrived at the fort to find the shelves of the trade room bare of goods, so no trading in of our robes and furs until the keelboats would arrive from Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone with fresh supplies. We went into camp just below the fort, and long and gloomy was our wait. It was the time of year when war party after war party of the Pikunis annually set out to raid enemy tribes; but now, fearful of Sun's displeasure, believing that he would not aid them, none would go. So, no more happy feast-gatherings; no more dancing; no more story-telling, jesting around our evening lodge fires.